

## Selectmen Take Action on Chemicals in Water

By SUSANNA SHOHAM

Selectmen this week voted unanimously to appoint an 11 member ad hoc committee of town officials and residents to investigate and report on the elevated levels of the chemical PCE (tetrachloroethylene) found in some of the town's water pipes.

Selectmen also said they would call a special town meeting this year to begin funding a water pipe replacement campaign for 15 miles of vinyl-lined asbestos

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cement water pipes, which were installed on 60 streets in Duxbury between 1969 and 1980. PCE can leach into the water system from these pipes.

In addition, selectmen said the town would take funds from the public works budget to hire an outside consultant to study the problem, and that they would issue weekly press releases about the PCE levels in pipes in various locations. They also agreed to ask the Duxbury community cable access television station to post PCE test results and information on this issue.

"Obviously we had a problem," Selectmen Chairman James Murphy said. "We're trying. We're moving as fast as a government agency can move."

Recently, PCE has been found at an elevated level of 14 parts per billion (ppb) in the Plantation Dr./South River Lane neighborhoods. The acceptable level set by the state is 5 parts per billion.

The 14 ppb of PCE in the Plantation Drive/South River Lane neighborhoods has dropped to zero because, following the discovery, water department officials immediately flushed hydrants in the area and opened a bleeder faucet that leaks water from the system at a controlled rate. This bleeder ensures water will constantly be circulating in this area, which doesn't have a looped water main.

Department of Public Works Director Walter Tonaszuck announced at the selectmen's meeting that water from Plantation Dr. tested a few days after the flushing contained no levels of PCE.

One specific cause for the elevated PCE levels in the Plantation Drive/South River Lane neighborhood was a "closed gate" in the system that created a dead end in the pipes, allowing this chemical to build up, according to Tonaszuck. He said he believed the gate was closed and left that way accidentally after the routine flushing of hydrants in the fall.

Tonaszuck also said the water department tested the water last Friday at other locations in town that have vinyl-lined cement pipes and that "all the results were good." In addition, he said every street with the vinyl-lined cement pipes was tested on Saturday and he is expecting those results this week.

The results of the Friday's sample testing showed the level of PCE on Old Barn Rd. was 1.7 ppb, said Tonaszuck, and at Old Farm Rd. it was 4.8 ppb, and 3.2 ppb on Basset Brook Lane. On Laurel St. the level was .5 ppb. At the Ellison High School and the Chandler elementary school, both of which have vinyl-lined cement pipes carrying their drinking water, the level was zero. Tonaszuck also said there was no PCE detected at Turkey Ridge Lane or Clearwater Drive.

"We're very encouraged by what we've heard so far," Tonaszuck said, adding that even though all these results were under the acceptable level of 5 ppb, he's instructed water officials to try to lower the levels on streets such as Basset Brook Lane and Old Farm Rd.

"We don't have all the results yet (from all the streets tested), but we know how to keep water under the 5 ppb limit. My opinion is that the water is safe to drink," Tonaszuck said.

Streets that have sections of pipe with the vinyl lining are the following:

Meadow Lane, Hitty Tom Rd., Clearwater Drive, Harvest Drive, Trout Farm Rd., Old Farm Rd., Cranberry Drive, Buckboard Rd., Turkey Ridge Lane, Bianca Rd., Bolas Rd., Stone Gate Lane, Christina Court, Bravender Rd., Plantation Rd., Seabury Point, Fordville Rd., Tanglewood Trail, Deerpath North and South, Highland Trail, Laurel St., Duxborough Trail, Tinkertown Lane, Pettibush Lane, Heritage Lane, Stockade Path, Wildflower Path, Bowsprit Lane, Reynolds Lane, Jeremiah Drive, Cordwood Path, Brewster St., Colonial Dr., Roundtree Dr., Treetop Lane, Trout Farm Lane, Basset Brook Lane, Woodland Way, Hidden Acres, Puritan Way, Brick Hill Lane, off Cross St. (conservation), Kich Way, South River Lane east and west, Grandview, Pioneer Dr.-Union Bridge, Millbrook Way off Church, Boxwood Lane, Bayberry Lane, Torrey Lane, Ledgewood Dr., Tinkertown Ponds, Millbrook Marshes, Park St., Old Barn Rd.

Worried neighbors in the Plantation Drive/South River Lane areas have met twice with town officials in the past week, and they told selectmen they hoped for a long-term solution to this problem.

Mary Leach of South River Lane East said: "Hopefully, we're working towards funding the replacement of pipes. That is the only way to eliminate the problem entirely."

To replace all 15 miles of vinyl-lined cement pipe at \$60 a linear foot would cost the town approximately \$4.8 million, an amount that would have to be borrowed and would require a 2/3 vote at town meeting.

"I don't see that as an insurmountable hurdle," Murphy said.

Selectmen discussed replacing all the pipes at once or beginning a replacement project, which would take up to 5 years to install new pipes.

In the meantime, they felt the issue needed more study and wanted the ad hoc committee to investigate. The committee will be made up of 4 town officials from the board of health, conservation commission, water advisory committee and the water department, as well as 7 residents. Selectmen have a list of residents interested in serving on this committee, but made no decision on these names this week as they were hoping to enlarge the list.

The committee will study the problem, gather information, and communicate their findings with both residents and the town officials. Selectmen hoped this committee would allow concerned residents and the town work together.

"From what I've heard, there is a high level of mistrust of the town," Selectman Friend Weiler said. "We're better off working together." Weiler's home is on one of the streets known to have sections of vinyl lined water pipes.

"Trust is something you earn," said Michael Gregg of Plantation Dr.

"I agree with your comment that we have to earn your trust," said Murphy, "and we will do that."

In addition to discussing this issue Monday night, the town called a public meeting last Thursday at 4 pm to address residents' concerns. Town Manager Rocco Longo, Lawrence Dayian, the state Department of Environmental



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Protection Director of Water Supply and Dr. Michael Hutchinson, a toxicologist with the DEP and Tonaszuck answer questions from neighbors, many of whom were concerned about the health risks of PCE. PCE is classified by the federal Environmental Protection Agency as "a probable human carcinogen," although the data for this comes from animal studies and there is "inadequate human evidence," stated a memo given out at the meeting.

To answer the health questions, Hutchinson explained how scientists calculate the health risks of exposure to chemicals. He said that the data scientist use to calculate the risks is based on lifetime exposure of 70 years. He said that if an average 154 lb. adult drank 2 liters of water with 5 ppb of PCE in it each day for 70 years his chance of getting cancer would be 1 in 1 million. If that same adult drank water with PCE level of 14 ppb, that person would have a 1 in 100,000 risk. "This is okay on a short term basis," Hutchinson said, "but you should do something about it."